

as contributing to the shift in Socialist thinking generally, and that of the Webbs in particular, away from anything that could be called "bureaucratic" Collectivism, to a more various and flexible form, in which the organisations of producers and of consumers each have their vital parts to play in a general plan more decentralised, and more thoroughly and consciously democratic, than they had thought of in their early analysis Gild Socialism, for instance, affected, directly and lastingly, the view taken of Nationalisation Once, State ownership and control over distribution, production and exchange, had been conceived, even by the Webbs, as concentrated in Departments of Government, national and municipal, rather on the Post Office model Sidney Webb always realised the part to be played by municipal action much more clearly than most "arm-chair" Socialists, but even there, he had been, before Gild Socialism, a more strict Collectivist than he was after it The importance attached to vocational associations, of all kinds, in their later works is, in part, a residuum of the Gild Socialist controversies, in part, however, a development of one of their own earlier lines of thinking A major effect of the whole thing was that it served to compel the non-political Webbs to come, with all their battalions of argument, and ultimately, all their resources for action, to the defence of the political State If these controversies, and the years in which they are set, present, to-day, a somewhat

bleached and unreal
appearance, that is due to the fact that, in
August 19145
the war swept them, like the great strikes
then on the
point of exploding, and the tense
political issues that
absorbed English minds to the practical
exclusion of what,
in July, was happening in Europe, into the
limbo of for-
gotten things For four grim years, the Webbs,
like everyone
else, were whirled out of the world they had
known, on the
wings of a blast that withered and dispersed
all old argu-